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THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

AN

ENQUIRY

BY

Colonel R. G. INGERSOLL,

REPRINTED FROM THE "NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW,"

With a Portrait of the Author, sketched from a photograph: an Introduction; a Bouquet *Terni*; and M. Gambetta's Definition of Religion.

Cum Privilegio Auctoris.

Reprinted for
B. F. and W. L. S.
Anno 1881.

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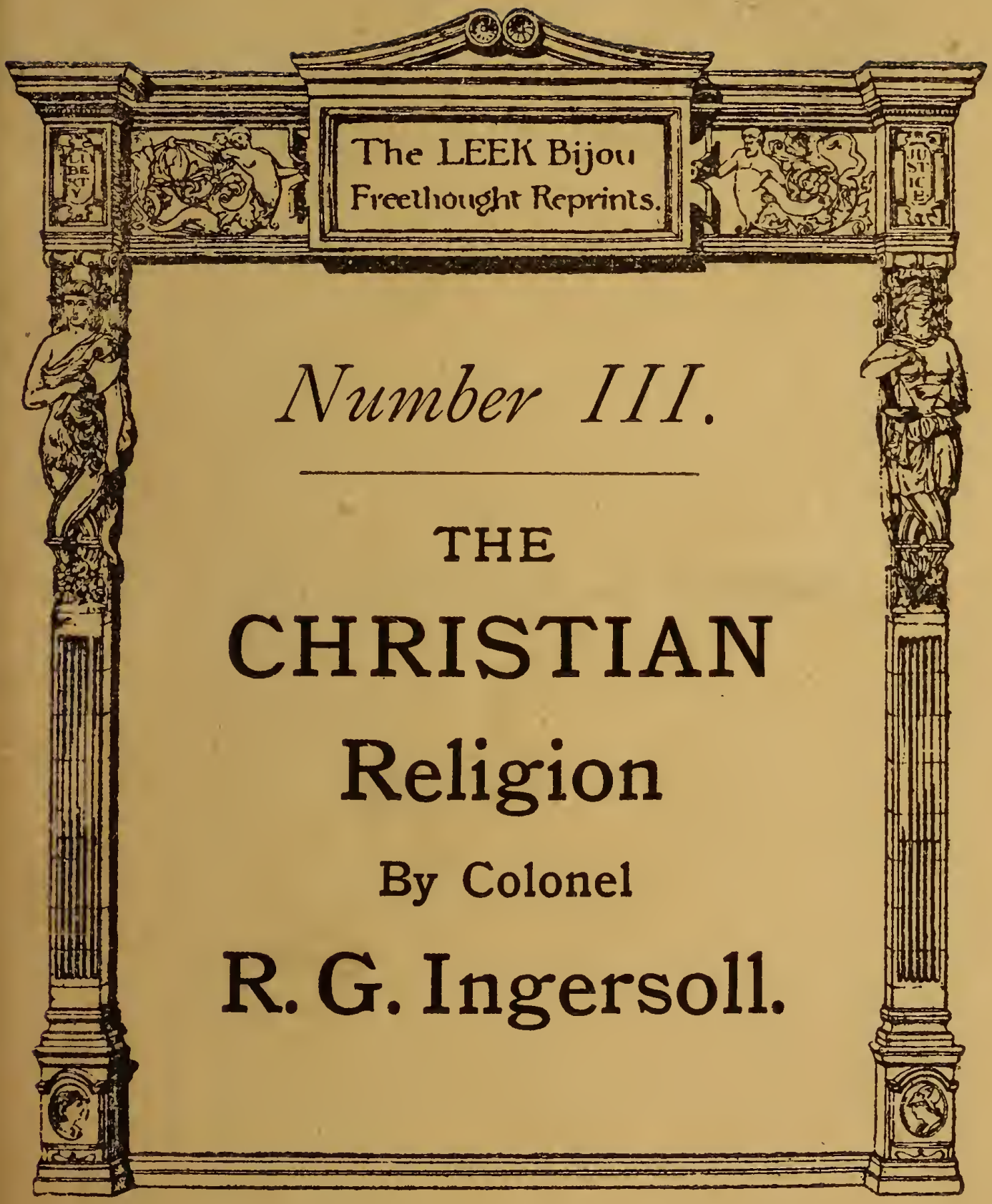

Number III.

THE CHRISTIAN Religion

By Colonel

R. G. Ingersoll.

[ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL.]

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THE BIJOU ADVERTISER.

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INTRODUCTION.

ENGLAND *is now for the first time offering to the toiling portion of its people a fair modicum of the education which was in old time the exclusive privilege of the rich. In doing so it has acted with a keen eye to self-*

preservation, for the history of every fallen nation shows that the unaided ignorance of the masses has been a principal and fatal element in its downfall.

This truth would seem to be not yet fully realized by all of higher education in the country; for the teaching that many of them counsel for the poor is clogged with ignorance and clouded with error from which their own higher culture has long been free. It is distressing to see men who no longer regard the Bible *as anything more than a curious and interesting record, a compound of reflections of ancient myths and poetry, commingled with a considerable amount of fabulous*

history and absurd theology—to see any such man still arguing that for the poor and for the young it is a necessary subject of study, and (for them) a useful article of belief!

Do those who argue thus deem the light of reason too clear, too pure, too delightful, for mankind at large; or is it that they trust that the useful ignorance of the workers will continue to supply them with unmerited or unworthy luxuries?

In neither case can the position endure. The refinement of Rome *might loftily echo*

Odi profanum vulgus et arceo:

but Rome *has herself fallen; and not*

on the portals of future science or of humanity shall any such motto be written. Freedom *of* Knowledge *is the corollary to* Freedom *of* Thought: *in the society of the future no hierarchy or oligarchy of intellect will close its doors upon the masses; none will find delight in either sensuous or intellectual pleasure obtained at the cost of the baser condition of others.*

The following Reprint *will be found a clear exposition of the incongruities of creed and record and dogma taught to the poor as a system of ethics for the whole of their life; and held as a convenient thing up to a certain age for the young, aud especially the female young, of the moneyed classes.*

It is time that such warfare as this should be aggressive ; that such books as the present should be part of the food of our children. Our truest feelings and our tenderest years have been enslaved to blind faith, unreasoning credulity and degrading fear ; our infant lips have beeu trained to link in loving accents the gentle and holy names of Mother *and of* Father *with that of a* God *of jealousy, of vengeance, and brutality ; our growing mind has been warned to look to a* Hebrew *ascetic as the noblest type of the divine, and to a* Hebrew *profligate and murderer as the highest type of the human. As the opening thought of youth has striven to turn to the*

light of reason, it has been constantly threatened back and thrust back into the dark of superstition. It has been told that eternal misery is the doom of those who leave the paths of dogma; and it has been falsely and persistently taught that Free-thinkers *are evil and unclean, men without care for right, scoffers at every good thing.*

But it is not scoffers who wage this war of the rational against the supernatural: let none deceive themselves with that vain thought, or perpetuate the incorrect assertion. Of such books as the present, such writings as the present, some at least are the words of men and women who have been born to, and striven toward a godly life, with

intense effort, with groanings not to be uttered: who, nursed in the bosom of the Church, *and partakers in all her most sacred ordinances, crushed down as unholy the first and the repeated breathings of doubt and of reason in their minds; who held to the falseness of their early teachings,—till there came that final struggle, when they wrestled with* God,—*to hold him,—not to lose him; gasping with fevered lips and shut teeth and scalding eye-lids,* "I will not let thee go": *and who won a blessing they knew not of, in that they proved the* Jehovah *of* Hebraism, *the* God *of* Christianity, *to be an* Apollyon *of* Superstition: *who cast him off in disgust, in loathing,*

in half despair; who lay faint and bleeding through a night of darkness: but to whom, with the dawn, has come the free and bracing air of reason, and then the deep warm glow of true life, and humanity, and universal love,—love given this time not to a fetish, but to every fellow being, to man and beast, to tree and moss, to stone and star.

With a great price obtained we this freedom, and we will that our Sons *and that our* Daughters *be free born. To such a liberator as* Robert G. Ingersoll *the thanks of present parents are lovingly offered; his name will be cherished by our children, and*

his memory hallowed in the gratitude of generations yet unborn.

B. E.

Rudyard:
9th Month, 1881.

* *BOUQUET GARNI.*

It is the curse of England that its intellect can see truths which its heart will not embody. LAURENCE OLIPHANT.

The root of all tyranny and oppression, of all social and human ills, is found in witholding from the masses of each community mental culture, or knowledge that may be conferred on all.
RD. CARLILE.

Atheism leaves to man reason, philosophy, natural piety, laws, reputation, and every thing that can serve to conduct him to virtue; but superstition destroys all these, and erects itself into tyranny over the understandings of men. BACON.

A healthy poetic nature wants, as you yourself say, no Moral Law, no Rights of Man, no Political Metaphysics. You might have added as well, it wants no Deity, no Immortality, to stay and uphold itself withal.
Letter from SCHILLER to GOETHE.

Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.
WORDSWORTH.

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* A *Bouquet Garni* is a little bundle of herbs, some bitter some sweet, but all salutary.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

I.

A PROFOUND change has taken place in the world of thought. The pews are trying to set themselves somewhat above the pulpit. The layman discusses theology with the minister, and smiles. *Christians* excuse themselves for belonging to the Church, by denying a part of the creed. The idea is abroad that they who know the most of nature believe the least about theology. The sciences

are regarded as infidels, and facts as scoffers. Thousands of most excellent people avoid churches, and, with few exceptions, only those attend prayer-meetings who wish to be alone. The pulpit is losing because the people are growing.

Of course it is still claimed that we are a *Christian* people, indebted to something called *Christianity* for all the progress we have made. There is still a vast difference of opinion as to what *Christianity* really is, although many warring sects have been discussing that question, with fire and sword,

through centuries of creed and crime. Every new sect has been denounced at its birth as illegitimate, as a something born out of orthodox wedlock and that should have been allowed to perish on the steps where it was found. Of the relative merits of the various denominations, it is sufficient to say that each claims to be right. Among the evangelical churches there is a substantial agreement upon what they consider the fundamental truths of the *Gospel.* These fundamental truths, as I understand them, are :

That there is a personal *God*, the creator of the material universe ; that he made man of the dust, and woman from part of the man ; that the man and woman were tempted by the *Devil;* that they were turned out of the garden of *Eden* ; that, about fifteen hundred years afterward, *God's* patience having been exhausted by the wickedness of mankind, he drowned his children with the exception of eight persons ; that afterward he selected from their descendants *Abraham*, and through him the *Jewish* people ; that he gave laws to these people, and tried to govern

them in all things ; that he made known his will in many ways ; that he wrought a vast number of miracles ; that he inspired men to write the *Bible ;* that, in the fulness of time, it having been found impossible to reform man, this *God* came upon earth as a child born of the *Virgin Mary ;* that he lived in *Palestine ;* that he preached for about three years, going from place to place, occasionally raising the dead, curing the blind and the halt ; that he was crucified—for the crime of blasphemy, as the *Jews* supposed, but that, as a matter of fact, he was offered as a

sacrifice for the sins of all who might have faith in him; that he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven where he now is, making intercession for his followers; that he will forgive the sins of all who believe on him, and that those who do not believe will be consigned to the dungeons of eternal pain. These—it may be with the addition of the sacraments of *Baptism* and the *Last Supper*—constitute what is generally known as the *Christian* religion.

It is most cheerfully admitted that a vast number of people not only

believe these things, but hold them in exceeding reverence, and imagine them to be of the utmost importance to mankind. They regard the *Bible* as the only light that *God* has given for the guidance of his children; that it is the one star in nature's sky—the foundation of all morality, of all law, of all order, and of all individual and national progress. They regard it as the only means we have for ascertaining the will of *God*, the origin of man, and the destiny of the soul.

It is needless to enquire into the causes that have led so many people

to believe in the inspiration of the *Scriptures.* In my opinion, they were and are mistaken, and the mistake has hindered, in countless ways, the civilization of man. The *Bible* has been the fortress and defence of nearly every crime. No civilized country could re-enact its laws, and in many respects its moral code is abhorrent to every good and tender man. It is admitted that many of its precepts are pure, that many of its laws are wise and just, and that many of its statements are absolutely true.

Without desiring to hurt the feelings

of anybody, I propose to give a few reasons for thinking that a few passages, at least, in the *Old Testament* are the product of a barbarous people.

In all civilized countries it is not only admitted, but it is passionately asserted, that slavery is and always was a hideous crime; that a war of conquest is simply murder; that polygamy is the enslavement of woman, the degradation of man, and the destruction of home; that nothing is more infamous than the slaughter of decrepit men, of helpless women, and of prattling babes; that captured

maidens should not be given to soldiers; that wives should not be stoned to death on account of their religious opinions, and that the death penalty ought not to be inflicted for a violation of the *Sabbath.* We know that there was a time, in the history of almost every nation, when slavery, polygamy, and wars of extermination were regarded as divine institutions; when women were looked upon as beasts of burden, and when, among some people, it was considered the duty of the husband to murder the wife for differing with him on the

subject of religion. Nations that entertain these views to-day are regarded as savage, and, probably, with the exception of the *South Sea Islanders*, the *Feejees*, some citizens of *Delaware*, and a few tribes in *Central Africa*, no human beings can be found degraded enough to agree upon these subjects with the *Jehovah* of the ancient *Jews*. The only evidence we have, or can have, that a nation has ceased to be savage is the fact that it has abandoned these doctrines. To every one, except the theologian, it is perfectly easy to

account for the mistakes, atrocities, and crimes of the past, by saying that civilization is a slow and painful growth ; that the moral perceptions are cultivated through ages of tyranny, of want, of crime, and of heroism ; that it requires centuries for man to put out the eyes of self and hold in lofty and in equal poise the scales of justice ; that conscience is born of suffering ; that mercy is the child of the imagination—of the power to put oneself in the sufferer's place, and that man advances only as he becomes acquainted with his surroundings, with

the mutual obligations of life, and learns to take advantage of the forces of nature.

But the believer in the inspiration of the *Bible* is compelled to declare that there was a time when slavery was right—when men could buy, and women could sell, their babes. He is compelled to insist that there was a time when polygamy was the highest form of virtue; when wars of extermination were waged with the sword of mercy; when religious toleration was a crime, and when death was the just penalty for having expressed an

honest thought. He must maintain that *Jehovah* is just as bad now as he was four thousand years ago, or that he was just as good then as he is now, but that human conditions have so changed that slavery, polygamy, religious persecutions, and wars of conquest are now perfectly devilish. Once they were right—once they were commanded by *God* himself; now, they are prohibited. There has been such a change in the conditions of man that, at the present time, the *Devil* is in favour of slavery, polygamy, religious persecution, and wars of

conquest. That is to say, the *Devil* entertains the same opinion to-day that *Jehovah* held four thousand years ago, but in the meantime *Jehovah* has remained exactly the same—changeless and incapable of change.

We find that other nations beside the *Jews* had similar laws and ideas; that they believed in and practised slavery and polygamy, murdered women and children, and exterminated their neighbours to the extent of their power. It is not claimed that they received a revelation. It is admitted that they had no knowledge of the

true *God*. And yet, by a strange coincidence, they practised the same crimes, of their own motion, that the *Jews* did by the command of *Jehovah*. From this it would seem that man can do wrong without a special revelation.

It will hardly be claimed, at this day, that the passages in the *Bible* upholding slavery, polygamy, war, and religious persecution are evidences of the inspiration of that book. Suppose that there had been nothing in the *Old Testament* upholding these crimes, would any modern *Christian* suspect that it was not inspired, on account of

the omission? Suppose that there had been nothing in the *Old Testament* but laws in favour of these crimes would any intelligent *Christian* now contend that it was the work of the true *God*? If the *Devil* had inspired a book, will some believer in the doctrine of inspiration tell us in what respect, on the subjects of slavery, polygamy war, and liberty, it would have differed from some parts of the *Old Testament*? Suppose that we should now discover a *Hindu* book of equal antiquity with the *Old Testament*, containing a defence of slavery,

polygamy, wars of extermination, and religious persecution, would we regard it as evidence that the writers were inspired by an infinitely wise and merciful *God*? As most other nations at that time practised these crimes, and as the *Jews* would have practised them all, even if left to themselves, one can hardly see the necessity of any inspired commands upon these subjects. Is there a believer in the *Bible* who does not wish that *God*, amid the thunders and lightnings of *Sinai*, had distinctly said to *Moses* that man should not own his fellow-

man; that women should not sell their babes; that men should be allowed to think and investigate for themselves, and that the sword should never be unsheathed to shed the blood of honest men? Is there a believer in the world, who would not be delighted to find that every one of these infamous passages are interpolations, and that the skirts of *God* were never reddened by the blood of maiden, wife, or babe? Is there a believer who does not regret that *God* commanded a husband to stone his wife to death for suggesting

the worship of the sun or moon? Surely, the light of experience is enough to tell us that slavery is wrong, that polygamy is infamous, and that murder is not a virtue. No one will now contend that it was worth *God's* while to impart the information to *Moses*, or to *Joshua*, or to anybody else, that the *Jewish* people might purchase slaves of the heathen, or that it was their duty to exterminate the natives of the *Holy Land*. The deists have contended that the *Old Testament* is too cruel and barbarous to be the

work of a wise and loving *God.* To this, the theologians have replied, that nature is just as cruel; that the earthquake, the volcano, the pestilence and storm, are just as savage as the *Jewish God*; and to my mind this is a perfect answer.

Suppose that we knew that after "inspired" men had finished the *Bible*, the *Devil* got possession of it, and wrote a few passages; what part of the sacred *Scriptures* would *Christians* now pick out as being probably his work? Which of the following passages would naturally be selected

as having been written by the *Devil*—"Love thy neighbour as thyself," or, "Kill all the males among the little ones, and kill every woman; but all the women children keep alive for yourselves"?

It may be that the best way to illustrate what I have said of the *Old Testament* is to compare some of the supposed teachings of *Jehovah* with those of persons who never read an "inspired" line, and who lived and died without having received the light of revelation. Nothing can be more suggestive than a comparison

of the ideas of *Jehovah*—the inspired words of the one claimed to be the infinite *God*, as recorded in the *Bible* —with those that have been expressed by men who, all admit, received no help from heaven.

In all ages of which any record has been preserved, there have been those who gave their ideas of justice, charity, liberty, love, and law. Now, if the *Bible* is really the work of *God*, it should contain the grandest and sublimest truths. It should, in all respects, excel the works of man. Within that book should be found the best and

loftiest definitions of justice ; the truest conceptions of human liberty ; the clearest outlines of duty ; the tenderest, the highest, and the noblest thoughts,—not that the human mind has produced, but that the human mind is capable of receiving. Upon every page should be found the luminous evidence of its divine origin. Unless it contains grander and more wonderful things than man has written, we are not only justified in saying, but we are compelled to say, that it was written by no being superior to man. It may be said that it is unfair

to call attention to certain bad things in the *Bible*, while the good are not so much as mentioned. To this it may be replied that a divine being would not put bad things in a book. Certainly a being of infinite intelligence, power, and goodness could never fall below the ideal of "depraved and barbarous" man. It will not do, after we find that the *Bible* upholds what we now call crimes, to say that it is not verbally inspired. If the words are not inspired, what is? It may be said that the thoughts are inspired. But this would include only the

thoughts expressed without words. If ideas are inspired, they must be contained in and expressed only by inspired words ; that is to say, the arrangement of the words, with relation to each other, must have been inspired. For the purpose of this perfect arrangement, the writers, according to the *Christian* world, were inspired. Were some sculptor inspired of *God* to make a statue perfect in its every part, we would not say that the marble was inspired, but the statue—the relation of part to part, the married harmony of form and function. The

language, the words, take the place of the marble, and it is the arrangement of these words that *Christians* claim to be inspired. If there is one uninspired word,—that is, one word in the wrong place, or a word that ought not to be there,—to that extent the *Bible* is an uninspired book. The moment it is admitted that some words are not, in their arrangement as to other words, inspired, then, unless with absolute certainty these words can be pointed out, a doubt is cast on all the words the book contains. If it was worth *God*'s while to make a revelation to

man at all, it was certainly worth his while to see to it that it was correctly made. He would not have allowed the ideas and mistakes of pretended prophets and designing priests to become so mingled with the original text that it is impossible to tell where he ceased and where the priests and prophets began. Neither will it do to say that *God* adapted his revelation to the prejudices of mankind. Of course it was necessary for an infinite being to adapt his revelation to the intellectual capacity of man ; but why should *God* confirm a barbarian in his pre-

judices? Why should he fortify a heathen in his crimes? If a revelation is of any importance whatever, it is to eradicate prejudices from the human mind. It should be a lever with which to raise the human race. Theologians have exhausted their ingenuity in finding excuses for *God*. It seems to me that they would be better employed in finding excuses for men. They tell us that the *Jews* were so cruel and ignorant that *God* was compelled to justify, or nearly to justify, many of their crimes, in order to have any influence with them what-

ever. They tell us that if he had declared slavery and polygamy to be criminal, the *Jews* would have refused to receive the ten commandments. They insist that, under the circumstances, *God* did the best he could; that his real intention was to lead them along slowly, step by step, so that, in a few hundred years, they would be induced to admit that it was hardly fair to steal a babe from its mother's breast. It has always seemed reasonable that an infinite *God* ought to have been able to make man grand enough to know, even without a

special revelation, that it is not altogether right to steal the labour, or the wife, or the child, of another. When the whole question is thoroughly examined, the world will find that *Jehovah* had the prejudices, the hatreds and the superstitions of his day.

If there is anything of value, it is liberty. Liberty is the air of the soul, the sunshine of life. Without it the world is a prison and the universe an infinite dungeon.

If the *Bible* is really inspired, *Jehovah* commanded the *Jewish* people to buy the children of the strangers

that sojourned among them, and ordered that the children thus bought should be an inheritance for the children of the *Jews*, and that they should be bondmen and bondwomen forever. Yet *Epictetus*, a man to whom no revelation was ever made, a man whose soul followed only the light of nature, and who had never heard of the *Jewish God*, was great enough to say: "Will you not remember that your servants are by nature your brothers, the children of *God*? In saying that you have bought them, you look down on the

earth, and into the pit, on the wretched law of men long since dead, but you see not the laws of the gods."

We find that *Jehovah*, speaking to his chosen people, assured them that their bondmen and their bondmaids must be "of the heathen that were round about them." "Of them," said *Jehovah*, "shall ye buy bondman and bondmaid." And yet *Cicero*, a pagan, *Cicero*, who had never been enlightened by reading the *Old Testament*, had the moral grandeur to declare: "They who say that we should love our fellow-citizens, but

not foreigners, destroy the universal brotherhood of mankind, with which benevolence and justice would perish forever."

If the *Bible* is inspired, *Jehovah*, *God* of all worlds, actually said : "And if a man smite his servant or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall be surely punished ; notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished, for he is his money." And yet *Zeno*, founder of the *Stoics*, centuries before *Christ* was born, in-

sisted that no man could be the owner of another, and that the title was bad, whether the slave had become so by conquest, or by purchase. *Jehovah* ordered a *Jewish* general to make war, and gave, among others, this command: "When the *Lord* thy *God* shall drive them before thee, thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them." And yet *Epictetus*, whom we have already quoted, gave this marvellous rule for the guidance of human conduct: "Live with thy in-

feriors as thou wouldst have thy superiors live with thee."

Is it possible, after all, that a being of infinite goodness and wisdom said: "I will heap mischief upon them; I will send my arrows upon them; they shall be burned with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction. I will send the tooth of beasts among them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling, also, with the man of grey hairs;" while *Seneca*,

an uninspired *Roman*, said: "The wise man will not pardon any crime that ought to be punished, but he will accomplish, in a nobler way, all that is sought in pardoning. He will spare some and watch over some, because of their youth, and others on account of their ignorance. His clemency will not fall short of justice, but will fulfil it perfectly."

Can we believe that *God* ever said of any one: "Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow; let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread

also out of their desolate places ; let the extortioner catch all that he hath and let the stranger spoil his labour ; let there be none to extend mercy unto him, neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children." If he ever said these words, surely he had never heard this line, this strain of music, from the *Hindu* : "Sweet is the lute to those who have not heard the prattle of their own children."

Jehovah, "from the clouds and darkness of *Sinai*," said to the *Jews* : "Thou shalt have no other gods before me . . . Thou shalt not bow

down thyself to them nor serve them ; for I, the *Lord* thy *God*, am a jealous *God*, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Contrast these with the words put by the *Hindu* in the mouth of *Brahma* : "I am the same to all mankind. They who honestly serve other gods, involuntarily worship me. I am he who partaketh of all worship, and I am the reward of all worshippers."

Compare these passages. The first, a dungeon where crawl the things

begot of jealous slime ; the other, great as the domed firmament inlaid with suns.

II.

WAIVING the contradictory statements in the various books of the *New Testament* ; leaving out of the question the history of the manuscripts ; saying nothing about the errors in translation and the interpolations made by the fathers ; and admitting, for the time being, that the books were all written at the times claimed, and by the persons whose names they bear, the questions of inspiration, probability, and absurdity still remain.

As a rule, where several persons testify to the same transaction, while agreeing in the main points, they will disagree upon many minor things, and such disagreement upon minor matters is generally considered as evidence that the witnesses have not agreed among themselves upon the story they should tell. These differences in statement we account for from the facts that all did not see alike, that all did not have the same opportunity for seeing, and that all had not equally good memories. But when we claim that the witnesses were inspired, we must admit that he

who inspired them did know exactly what occurred, and consequently there should be no contradiction, even in the minutest detail. The accounts should be not only substantially, but they should be actually, the same. It is impossible to account for any differences, or any contradictions, except from the weaknesses of human nature, and these weaknesses cannot be predicated of divine wisdom. Why should there be more than one correct account of anything? Why were four gospels necessary? One inspired record of all that happened ought to be enough.

One great objection to the *Old Testament* is the cruelty said to have been commanded by *God*, but all the cruelties recounted in the *Old Testament* ceased with death. The vengeance of *Jehovah* stopped at the portal of the tomb. He never threatened to avenge himself upon the dead; and not one word, from the first mistake in *Genesis* to the last curse of *Malachi*, contains the slightest intimation that God will punish in another world. It was reserved for the *New Testament* to make known the frightful doctrine of

eternal pain. It was the teacher of universal benevolence who rent the veil between time and eternity, and fixed the horrified gaze of man on the lurid gulfs of hell. Within the breast of non-resistance was coiled the worm that never dies.

One great objection to the *New Testament* is that it bases salvation upon belief. This, at least, is true of the *Gospel* according to *John*, and of many of the epistles. I admit that *Matthew* never heard of the *Atonement*, and died utterly ignorant of the scheme of salvation. I also admit

that *Mark* never dreamed that it was necessary for a man to be born again ; that he knew nothing of the mysterious doctrine of *Regeneration*, and that he never even suspected that it was necessary to believe anything. In the sixteenth chapter of *Mark*, we are told that " He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" ; but this passage has been shown to be an interpolation, and, consequently, not a solitary word is found in the *Gospel* according to *Mark* upon the subject of salvation by faith. The same is

also true of the *Gospel* of *Luke*. It says not one word as to the necessity of believing on *Jesus Christ*, not one word as to the *Atonement*, not one word upon the scheme of salvation, and not the slightest hint that it is necessary to believe anything here in order to be happy hereafter.

And I here take occasion to say, that with most of the teachings of the *Gospels* of *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* I most heartily agree. The miraculous parts must, of course, be thrown aside. I admit that the necessity of *Belief*, the *Atonement*, and the scheme

of salvation are all set forth in the *Gospel* of *John*,—a *Gospel*, in my opinion, not written until long after the others.

According to the prevailing *Christian* belief, the *Christian* religion rests upon the doctrine of the *Atonement*. If this doctrine is without foundation, if it is repugnant to justice and mercy, the fabric falls. We are told that the first man committed a crime for which all his posterity are responsible,—in other words, that we are accountable, and can be justly punished for a sin we never in fact committed. This

absurdity was the father of another, namely, that a man can be rewarded for a good action done by another. *God*, according to the modern theologians, made a law, with the penalty of eternal death for its infraction. All men, they say, have broken that law. In the economy of heaven, this law had to be vindicated. This could be done by damning the whole human race. Through what is known as the *Atonement*, the salvation of a few was made possible. They insist that the law—whatever that is—demanded the extreme penalty, that justice called for

its victims, and that even mercy ceased to plead. Under these circumstances *God*, by allowing the innocent to suffer, satisfactorily settled with the law, and allowed a few of the guilty to escape. The law was satisfied with this arrangement. To carry out this scheme, *God* was born as a babe into this world. "He grew in stature and increased in knowledge." At the age of thirty-three, after having lived a life filled with kindness, charity, and nobility, after having practised every virtue, he was sacrificed as an atonement for man. It is claimed that he

actually took our place, and bore our sins and our guilt ; that in this way the justice of *God* was satisfied, and that the blood of *Christ* was an atonement, an expiation, for the sins of all who might believe on him.

Under the *Mosaic* dispensation, there was no remission of sin except through the shedding of blood. If a man committed certain sins, he must bring to the priest a lamb, a bullock, a goat, or a pair of turtle-doves. The priest would lay his hands upon the animal, and the sin of the man would be transferred. Then the animal

would be killed in the place of the real sinner, and the blood thus shed and sprinkled upon the altar would be an atonement. In this way *Jehovah* was satisfied. The greater the crime, the greater the sacrifice—the more blood, the greater the atonement. There was always a certain ratio between the value of the animal and the enormity of the sin. The most minute directions were given about the killing of these animals, and about the sprinkling of their blood. Every priest became a butcher, and every sanctuary a slaughter-house. Nothing

could be more utterly shocking to a refined and loving soul. Nothing could have been better calculated to harden the heart than this continual shedding of innocent blood. This terrible system is supposed to have culminated in the sacrifice of *Christ*. His blood took the place of all other. It is necessary to shed no more. The law at last is satisfied, satiated, surfeited. The idea that *God* wants blood is at the bottom of the *Atonement*, and rests upon the most fearful savagery. How can sin be transferred from men to animals, and how can the

shedding of the blood of animals atone for the sins of men ?

The Church says that the sinner is in debt to *God*, and that the obligation is discharged by the *Saviour*. The best that can possibly be said of such a transaction is, that the debt is transferred, not paid. The truth is, that a sinner is in debt to the person he has injured. If a man injures his neighbour, it is not enough for him to get the forgiveness of *God*, but he must have the forgiveness of his neighbour. If a man puts his hand in the fire and *God* forgives him, his

hand will smart exactly the same. You must, after all, reap what you sow. No god can give you wheat when you sow tares, and no devil can give you tares when you sow wheat.

There are in nature neither rewards nor punishments—there are consequences. The life of *Christ* is worth its example, its moral force, its heroism of benevolence.

To make innocence suffer is the greatest sin; how then is it possible to make the suffering of the innocent a justification for the criminal? Why should a man be willing to let the

innocent suffer for him? Does not the willingness show that he is utterly unworthy of the sacrifice? Certainly, no man would be fit for heaven who would consent that an innocent person should suffer for his sin. What would we think of a man who would allow another to die for a crime that he himself had committed? What would we think of a law that allowed the innocent to take the place of the guilty? Is it possible to vindicate a just law by inflicting punishment on the innocent? Would not that be a second violation instead of a vindication?

If there was no general *Atonement*

until the crucifixion of *Christ*, what became of the countless millions who died before that time? And it must be remembered that the blood shed by the *Jews* was not for other nations. *Jehovah* hated foreigners. The *Gentiles* were left without forgiveness. What has become of the millions who have died since, without having heard of the *Atonement*? What becomes of those who have heard but have not believed? It seems to me that the doctrine of the *Atonement* is absurd, unjust, and immoral. Can a law be satisfied by the execution of the wrong person? When a man commits a

crime, the laws demands his punishment, not that of a substitute; and there can be no law, human or divine, that can be satisfied by the punishment of a substitute. Can there be a law that demands that the guilty be rewarded? And yet, to reward the guilty is far nearer justice than to punish the innocent.

According to the orthodox theology, there would have been no heaven had no *Atonement* been made. All the children of men would have been cast into hell forever. The old men bowed with grief, the smiling mothers, the

sweet babes, the loving maidens, the brave, the tender, and the just, would have been given over to eternal pain. Man, it is claimed, can make no *Atonement* for himself. If he commits one sin, and with that exception lives a life of perfect virtue, still that one sin would remain unexpiated, unatoned, and for that one sin he would be forever lost. To be saved by the goodness of another, to be a redeemed debtor forever, has in it something repugnant to manhood.

We must also remember that *Jehovah* took special charge of the

Jewish people; and we have always been taught that he did so for the purpose of civilizing them. If he had succeeded in civilizing the *Jews*, he would have made the damnation of the entire human race a certainty; because, if the *Jews* had been a civilized people when *Christ* appeared,—a people whose hearts had not been hardened by the laws and teachings of *Jehovah*,—they would not have crucified him, and, as a consequence, the world would have been lost. If the *Jews* had believed in religious freedom,—in the right of thought and speech,—not a human

soul could ever have been saved. If, when *Christ* was on his way to *Calvary*, some brave, heroic soul had rescued him from the holy mob, he would not only have been eternally damned for his pains, but would have rendered impossible the salvation of any human being; and, except for the crucifixion of her son, the *Virgin Mary*, if the church is right, would be to-day among the lost.

In countless ways the *Christian* world has endeavoured, for nearly two thousand years, to explain the *Atonement*, and every effort has ended

in an admission that it cannot be understood, and a declaration that it must be believed. Is it not immoral to teach that man can sin, that he can harden his heart and pollute his soul, and that, by repenting and believing something that he does not comprehend, he can avoid the consequences of his crimes? Has the promise and hope of forgiveness ever prevented the commission of a sin? Should men be taught that sin gives happiness here; that they ought to bear the evils of a virtuous life in this world for the sake of joy in the next; that

they can repent between the last sin and the last breath; that after repentance every stain of the soul is washed away by the innocent blood of another; that the serpent of regret will not hiss in the ear of memory; that the saved will not even pity the victims of their own crimes; that the goodness of another can be transferred to them; and that sins forgiven cease to affect the unhappy wretches sinned against?

Another objection is that a certain belief is necessary to save the soul. It is often asserted that to believe is

the only safe way. If you wish to be safe, be honest. Nothing can be safer than that. No matter what his belief may be, no man, even in the hour of death, can regret having been honest. It never can be necessary to throw away your reason to save your soul. A soul without reason is scarcely worth saving. There is no more degrading doctrine than that of mental non-resistance. The soul has a right to defend its castle—the brain, and he who waives that right becomes a serf and slave. Neither can I admit that a man, by doing me an injury, can

place me under obligation to do him a service. To render benefits for injuries is to ignore all distinctions between actions. He who treats his friends and enemies alike has neither love nor justice. The idea of non-resistance never occurred to a man with power to protect himself. This doctrine was the child of weakness, born when resistance was impossible. To allow a crime to be committed when you can prevent it, is next to committing the crime yourself. And yet, under the banner of non-resistance, the *Church* has shed the blood of

millions, and in the folds of her sacred vestments have gleamed the daggers of assassination. With her cunning hands she wove the purple for hypocrisy, and placed the crown upon the brow of crime. For a thousand years larceny held the scales of justice, while beggars scorned the princely sons of toil, and ignorant fear denounced the liberty of thought.

If *Christ* was in fact *God*, he knew all the future. Before him, like a panorama, moved the history yet to be. He knew exactly how his words would be interpreted. He knew what

crimes, what horrors, what infamies, would be committed in his name. He knew that the fires of persecution would climb around the limbs of countless martyrs. He knew that brave men would languish in dungeons, in darkness, filled with pain; that the *Church* would use instruments of torture, that his followers would appeal to whip and chain. He must have seen the horizon of the future red with the flames of the *Auto-da-Fe*. He knew all the creeds that would spring like poison fungi from every text. He saw the sects waging war

against each other. He saw thousands of men, under the orders of priests, building dungeons for their fellow-men. He saw them using instruments of pain. He heard the groans, saw the faces white with agony, the tears, the blood—heard the shrieks and sobs of all the moaning, martyred multitudes. He knew that commentaries would be written on his words with swords, to be read by the light of fagots. He knew that the *Inquisition* would be born of teachings attributed to him. He saw all the interpolations and falsehoods that hypocrisy would

write and tell. He knew that above these fields of death, these dungeons, these burnings, for a thousand years would float the dripping banner of the cross. He knew that in his name his followers would trade in human flesh, that cradles would be robbed, and women's breasts unbabed for gold, and yet he died with voiceless lips. Why did he fail to speak ? Why did he not tell his disciples, and through them the world, that man should not persecute, for opinion's sake, his fellow-man ? Why did he not cry, You shall not persecute in my name ; you shall

not burn and torment those who differ from you in creed? Why did he not plainly say, I am the *Son* of *God?* Why did he not explain the doctrine of the *Trinity*? Why did he not tell the manner of baptism that was pleasing to him? Why did he not say something positive, definite, and satisfactory about another world? Why did he not turn the tear-stained hope of heaven to the glad knowledge of another life? Why did he go dumbly to his death, leaving the world to misery and to doubt?

He came, they tell us, to make a

revelation, and what did he reveal? "Love thy neighbour as thyself"? That was in the Old Testament. "Love God with all thy heart"? That was in the Old Testament. "Return good for evil"? That was said by *Buddha* seven hundred years before he was born. "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you"? This was the doctrine of *Laotse*. Did he come to give a rule of action? *Zoroaster* had done this long before: "Whenever thou art in doubt as to whether an action is good or bad, abstain from it." Did he come

to teach us of another world? The immortality of the soul had been taught by *Hindus*, *Egyptians*, *Greeks*, and *Romans* hundreds of years before he was born. Long before, the world had been told by *Socrates* that: "One who is injured ought not to return the injury, for on no account can it be right to do an injustice; and it is not right to return an injury, or to do evil to any man, however much we may have suffered from him."

And *Cicero* had said: "Let us not listen to those who think that we ought to be angry with our enemies

and who believe this to be great and manly : nothing is more praiseworthy, nothing so clearly shows a great and noble soul, as clemency and readiness to forgive."

Is there anything nearer perfect than this from *Confucius* : "For benefits return benefits ; for injuries return justice without any admixture of revenge" ?

The dogma of eternal punishment rests upon passages in the *New Testament.* This infamous belief subverts every idea of justice. Around the angel of immortality the *Church*

has coiled this serpent. A finite being can neither commit an infinite sin, nor a sin against the infinite. A being of infinite goodness and wisdom has no right, according to the human standard of justice, to create any being destined to suffer eternal pain. A being of infinite wisdom would not create a failure, and surely a man destined to everlasting agony is not a success.

How long, according to the universal benevolence of the *New Testament*, can a man be reasonably punished in the next world for failing

to believe something unreasonable in this? Can it be possible that any punishment can endure forever? Suppose that every flake of snow that ever fell was a figure nine, and that the first flake was multiplied by the second, and that product by the third, and so on to the last flake. And then suppose that this total should be multiplied by every drop of rain that ever fell, calling each drop a figure nine; and that total by each blade of grass that ever helped to weave a carpet for the earth, calling each blade a figure nine,

and that again by every grain of sand on every shore, so that the grand total would make a line of nines so long that it would require millions upon millions of years for light, travelling at the rate of one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles per second, to reach the end. And suppose, further, that each unit in this almost infinite total stood for billions of ages—still that vast and almost endless time, measured by all the years beyond, is as one flake, one drop, one leaf, one blade, one grain, compared with all the flakes,

and drops, and leaves, and blades, and grains.

Upon love's breast the *Church* has placed the *eternal* asp.

And yet, in the same book in which is taught this most infamous of doctrines, we are assured that "The *Lord* is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

III.

SO FAR as we know, man is the author of all books. If a book had been found on the earth by the first man, he might have regarded it as the work of *God*; but as men were here a good while before any books were found, and as man has produced a great many books, the probability is that the *Bible* is no exception.

Most nations, at the time the *Old Testament* was written, believed in slavery, polygamy, wars of extermination, and religious persecution ; and it is not wonderful that the book contained nothing contrary to such belief. The fact that it was in exact accord with the morality of its time proves that it was not the product of any being superior to man. "The inspired writers" upheld or established slavery, countenanced polygamy, commanded wars of extermination, and ordered the slaughter of women and babes. In these respects they were

precisely like the uninspired savages by whom they were surrounded. They also taught and commanded religious persecution as a duty, and visited the most trivial offences with the punishment of death. In these particulars they were in exact accord with their barbarian neighbours. They were utterly ignorant of geology and astronomy, and knew no more of what had happened than of what would happen ; and, so far as accuracy is concerned, their history and prophecy were about equal ; in other words, they were just as ignorant as

those who lived and died in *Nature's* night.

Does any *Christian* believe that if *God* were to write a book now, he would uphold the crimes commanded in the *Old Testament?* Has *Jehovah* improved? Has infinite mercy become more merciful? Has infinite wisdom intellectually advanced? Will any one claim that the passages upholding slavery have liberated mankind; that we are indebted for our modern homes to the texts that made polygamy a virtue; or that religious liberty found its soil, its light, and rain,

in the infamous verse wherein the husband is commanded to stone to death the wife for worshipping an unknown *God?*

The usual answer to these objection is that no country has ever been civilized without the *Bible.*

The *Jews* were the only people to whom *Jehovah* made his will directly known,—the only people who had the *Old Testament.* Other nations were utterly neglected by their *Creator.* Yet, such was the effect of the *Old Testament* on the *Jews,* that they crucified a kind, loving, and perfectly

innocent man. They could not have done much worse without a *Bible*. In the crucifixion of *Christ*, they followed the teachings of his *Father*. If, as it is now alleged by the theologians, no nation can be civilized without a *Bible*, certainly *God* must have known the fact six thousand years ago, as well as the theologians know it now. Why did he not furnish every nation with a *Bible ?*

As to the *Old Testament*, I insist that all the bad passages were written by men ; that those passages were not inspired. I insist that a being of in-

finite goodness never commanded man to enslave his fellow-man, never told a mother to sell her babe, never established polygamy, never ordered one nation to exterminate another, and never told a husband to kill his wife because she suggested the worshipping of some other *God.*

I also insist that the *Old Testament* would be a much better book with all of these passages left out; and, whatever may be said of the rest, the passages to which attention has been drawn can with vastly more propriety be attributed to a *Devil* than to a *God.*

Take from the *New Testament* all passages upholding the idea that belief is necessary to salvation; that *Christ* was offered as an atonement for the sins of the world; that the punishment of the human soul will go on forever; that heaven is the reward of faith, and hell the penalty of honest investigation; take from it all miraculous stories,—and I admit that all the good passages are true. If they are true, it makes no difference whether they are inspired or not. Inspiration is only necessary to give authority to that which is repugnant to human reason.

Only that which never happened needs to be substantiated by miracles. The universe is natural.

The *Church* must cease to insist that the passages upholding the institutions of savage men were inspired of *God.* The dogma of the *Atonement* must be abandoned. Good deeds must take the place of faith. The savagery of eternal punishment must be renounced. Credulity is not a virtue, and investigation is not a crime. Miracles are the children of mendacity. Nothing can be more wonderful than the majestic, unbroken,

sublime, and eternal procession of causes and effects.

Reason must be the final arbiter, "Inspired" books attested by miracles cannot stand against a demonstrated fact. A religion that does not command the respect of the greatest minds will, in a little while, excite the mockery of all. Every civilized man believes in the liberty of thought. Is it possible that *God* is intolerant? Is an act infamous in man one of the virtues of the *Deity?* Could there be progress in heaven without intellectual liberty? Is the freedom of the future

to exist only in perdition? Is it not, after all, barely possible that a man acting like *Christ* can be saved? Is a man to be eternally rewarded for believing according to evidence, without evidence, or against evidence? Are we to be saved because we are good, or because another was virtuous? Is credulity to be winged and crowned, while honest doubt is chained and damned?

Do not misunderstand me. My position is that the cruel passages in the *Old Testament* are not inspired; that slavery, polygamy, wars of exter-

mination, and religious persecution, always have been, are, and forever will be, abhorred and cursed by the honest, the virtuous, and the loving; that the innocent cannot justly suffer for the guilty, and that vicarious vice and vicarious virtue are equally absurd; that eternal punishment is eternal revenge; that only the natural can happen; that miracles prove the dishonesty of the few and the credulity of the many; and that, according to *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, salvation does not depend upon belief, nor the *Atonement*, nor a "second birth," but

that these gospel are in exact harmony with the declaration of the great *Persian*: "Taking the first footstep with the good thought, the second with the good word, and the third with the good deed, I entered paradise."

The dogmas of the past no longer reach the level of the highest thought, nor satisfy the hunger of the heart. While dusty faiths, embalmed and sepulchered in ancient texts, remain the same, the sympathies of men enlarge; the brain no longer kills its young; the happy lips give liberty to

honest thoughts; the mental firmament expands and lifts; the broken clouds drift by; the hideous dreams, the foul, misshapen children of the monstrous night, dissolve and fade.

GROWTH.

PARIS, Sunday, August 28, 9-30 p.m.

M. Gambetta *presided this afternoon in the* Winter Circus *at an address on* Moral and Religious Teaching, *given by* M. PAUL BERT, *the* savant *and deputy, for the benefit of a secular school and library in the* 20th Arrondissement. *The price of the tickets ranged between 5 francs and 50 centimes, and many of them sold at more than 100 per cent. premium. It will be readily inferred, therefore, that the 4,000 people who crowded the circus were not the populace. They consisted, in fact, of the lower section of the middle and the upper section of the working class, the strata with whom* M. GAMBETTA *is really most popular. His reception this afternoon was quite enthusiastic* . . . . . .

M. BERT *insisted that* Morality *was not interwoven with* Religion, *for all societies had prohibited theft, murder, and so forth, so that for such enactments* "CE N'ETAIT PAS LA PEINE DE DERANGER DIEU LE PERE." *He concluded by contrasting the* School *which taught fixed natural laws, industry, self-reliance, and family ties, with the* Church *which taught constant and capricious suspensions of laws, self-distrust, the efficacy of rites and ceremonies, and the sacredness of celibacy —the one producing an honest, industrious citizen, the other an ignorant, lazy monk. Modern societies, he said, were advancing towards* Morality *and proportionately receding from* Religion. . . .

To-day's meeting is in more than one respect significant. This is certainly the first time that Catholic *literature and teaching have been held up to ridicule and opprobrium by a future* Minister of Education *in the presence of and with the approval of a future* Premier *and* President. . . . . M. GAMBETTA, *to-day, not only joined in the merriment and cheering, but he highly eulogized* M. BERT, *and this is why I have reserved his remarks to the last. After thanking the audience for so eagerly responding to an invitation in the interest of education, he said:—"You know that, notwithstanding all difficulties and the inevitable vexations of public life, I have always remained inviolably attached to the cause of democratic progress, not that chimerical progress which is sometimes put forward, but that which never recoils before obstacles and is never intoxicated with the favours of fortune. Of all the efforts of thinkers, writers, and statesmen there is only one which is really efficacious, profound, and productive—viz., the diffusion of education, that social capital, the best of all capitals, which gives every man who comes into the world the means of gaining all other capitals, and thus of securing a position without force, without violence, without civil war.* TRUE RELIGION, *for that sublime word means* THE BOND BETWEEN MAN AND MAN, IS THAT WHICH ENABLES A MAN ON MEETING HIS FELLOW TO RESPECT BOTH HIS OWN AND THE OTHER'S DIGNITY BASED ON EQUITY AND LIBERTY. *It is for the diffusion of that religion we have met, and these great gatherings are the real* Passovers *of democracy."*

—THE "TIMES," AUGUST 29, 1881.

STUNT.

Mr. W. S. Allen, M.P., (Newcastle-under-Lyme), speaking at the Œcumenical Methodist Conference in London, September 15th, 1881, said :—"Rowland Hill once said, some men preach the Gospel as a donkey mumbles a thistle, very cautiously. Let us be faithful. LET US MAKE *the Saviour as precious—heaven as bright—holiness as holy—sin as black—*HELL AS HOT—AND DAMNATION AS AWFUL AND ETERNAL *as Christ and the Bible make them."*

—THE "NEWCASTLE GUARDIAN,"
SEPT. 17TH, 1881.

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TO No. II.

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A FEW OPINIONS.

Dr. PARKER (*of the* City Temple) *says*:—"Under this title a remarkable lecture has been delivered in America by *Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll*, who is announced as a minister of the Gospel of Freethought. About the lecturer I know nothing more than he has told me himself in his eloquent lecture. I judge him to be a man of rare power as a speaker. . . . The lecturer is reported to have said that 'his principal objections to orthodox religion are two—slavery here, and hell hereafter.' . . . I have nothing to do with what the lecturer vaguely calls 'orthodox religion.' . . I do not undertake either to impeach or to defend any particular sect. I abhor sectarianism. I regard religious bigotry as an unmitigated curse. I have no doubt that creeds of human making, when regarded as other than initial, suggestive, and especially when associated with penalty, have done more harm to Christianity than has ever been done by any form of speculative infidelity. No theological creed has ever received my signature. . . . I heartily join the lecturer in many of his censures and condemnations in reference to formal creeds, manufactured orthodoxies, and official pretensions. Christianity has suffered grievously from over-

organisation. She has been made to sign too many documents, and to keep too many detectives, and to trust too much to the peculiar utterance of sanctified syllables. . . . I know of no creature more despicable than the man whose Christianity is destitute of the spirit of *Christ*. There can be no meaner wretch. He is orthodox in words, but heterodox in actions. He could send men to hell without a tear or a groan. He has patronised a crucifix, but has never died upon a cross. His *Christ* is an historical name, not a present power. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing. He is a whited sepulchre. He has 'stolen the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in.' I decline his advocacy. I repudiate every title to consideration which he asserts. And *Christ* Himself will say to him and to his whole class, 'Depart from me, I know you not.'"—*Ingersoll Answered*.

LIGHT says:—"With much that *Colonel Ingersoll* says about conventional Christianity *Dr. Parker* agrees. . . . The two men are looking at two sides of the shield, and the reader rises from a perusal of the reply with a feeling that a large part of *Ingersoll's* criticism has been left untouched. . . . *Dr. Parker* likes, as little as the free-spoken freethinker, the accretions that have been piled around the simple teaching of Jesus Christ; but he does not see, as *Ingersoll* does, that till these are removed there is little chance of the simple truth prevailing. *Ingersoll*, on his part, is iconoclastic. His

eye is filled with the abuses of theology, and he attacks them, and 'smites them hip and thigh.' . . . There can be no doubt that *Colonel Ingersoll* is open to assault, as every man who deals in sweeping criticism is. There can be just as little doubt that he has fastened on many a blot, and that he is most effective in his destructive criticism. He is in himself a sign of the times" *And in a later issue:—"The Psychological Review* is disposed to think, 'that space is wasted by the consideration (apparently with approval) of such writers as *Ingersoll*.' We cannot coincide in this opinion. We have considered *Ingersoll* as a sign of the times. We have carefully abstained from entering into the merits and demerits of his particular utterances; but we have not disguised our opinion that his assaults upon vulgar theology have been of distinct value to the cause of truth. They have laid bare popular errors in a way that no writer has ever done before; and by so doing they have drawn an amount of attention to popular misconceptions and fallacies, which must be serviceable in removing them from the thinking mind. This, in our judgment, is direct gain. . Before us lies a thick pamphlet, containing replies from *Bishop Fallows, Dr. Thomas, Dr. Lorimer, Dr. Courtney, Professors Swing and Curtis.* We have already seen that *Dr. Parker* in this country has equipped himself for a tilt with *Ingersoll.* These representative men, in their several ways, bring out their individual views of truth, and make a not incon-

siderable contribution to the settlement of some questions which *Ingersoll's* drastic criticism has brought into discussion. It should be a matter of rejoicing, rather than of complaint, that this has been the result. We have little doubt that such methods of purification are necessary and beneficient in their action."

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